



Dear Arizona,
My mother's birthday
is coming up, and I
really want to give her
a special present. Any
ideas?
—Presently Presentless
in Puerto Rico



BB Sams

Ollie's Cake Catastrophe

By Lissa Rovetch Art by Mona Caron

Dear Presently Presentless,

Whatever you do, don't do what I did! I wanted to make my mom the best birthday cake ever. There was just one teensy little complication: I didn't know how to bake.

"No problem," said Ollie. "We can make a cake at my house!"

"You know how to make cakes?" I asked.

"Of course," said Ollie. "I know how to make tons of stuff! I watch those cooking shows with my grandmother all the time."

"Wow," I said. "I can't believe I never knew this about you!"

I was beyond excited. I could hardly wait to surprise my mother with a magnificent cake. And Ollie really *did* seem to know what he was doing—at first, that is.

He made sure we washed our hands and cleared off our workspace and all that good stuff. Then he got out the flour and sugar and butter and eggs.

**I wanted to
make my mom
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ever.**

"Are you positive this is OK with your grandmother?" I asked.

"Totally!" Ollie said, cracking open a bunch of eggs. "She loves it when I help out in the kitchen—just as long as she's around for the actual cooking part."

So there was Ollie throwing all these things into a bowl, and

there was me, super-psyched to be making a real homemade cake for my mom. But then . . . there was Ollie, throwing all these *other* ingredients into the bowl, and there was me, getting a little less

excited and a lot more nervous all the time.

"Um, shouldn't we be following some kind of recipe?" I asked.

"No way!" Ollie said, dumping a bag of marshmallows into the mixture. "Great chefs never use recipes."

"They don't?" I asked.

"Of course not," Ollie said as he added grapes, almonds, maple syrup, chocolate powder, cereal,

popcorn, raisins, applesauce, peanut butter, and all kinds of other weird things to the batter. "Great taste comes from great creativity!"

"Um, yeah, creativity's cool and everything," I said, "but I seriously don't know about this!"

"Trust me, Arizona," said Ollie. "I know what I'm doing!"

And that's when I knew that my cake was in major trouble.

Don't get me wrong. Ollie's a fantastic guy and an amazing friend. But I've known him since beyond forever, and if there's one thing I've learned, it's this: When he says, "Trust me—I know what I'm doing!" it pretty much *always* means something bad is about to happen.

And it did.

Ollie held the electric mixer over the bowl and turned it on high speed.

"AHHHHHH!" we screamed together as Ollie's "creative" cake batter splattered everywhere imaginable, including all over both of us!



Ollie said he knew how to bake.

Ollie's grandmother came to the rescue.

For a second, I was mad and sad and everything in between. But as soon as I stopped and saw how ridiculous Ollie and I looked, completely covered in his cake concoction, I started laughing uncontrollably.

It ended up taking us at least five times longer to clean up the mess than it had taken us to make the batter in the first place. And after we thought we'd wiped up every last drop, Ollie's grandmother made us clean even more, after reminding Ollie never to use the electric mixer when she wasn't helping him.

Luckily, she helped us make a whole new cake—with a recipe.

We made a new cake—with a recipe.

It was chocolate on the inside and vanilla on the outside, with "Happy Birthday Best Mom Ever" written in purple frosting.

"Oh, I absolutely love it!" my mother said. "What a thoughtful and creative gift!"

"Well, you know what they say," I said, winking at Ollie. "Great taste comes from great creativity!"

So, dear Presently Presentless, about that gift for your mom—here's what I know for sure:

1. Most moms and dads and grandparents really seem to like homemade stuff. Cards with notes on the inside and drawings (or pictures from

magazines) on the outside are always big hits with my family.

2. If you're feeling brave and decide to try the cake thing, good luck! Just make sure you get plenty of help from someone like Ollie's grandmother, who actually knows what to do.
3. Try not to worry too much about your present looking perfect. I know we've all heard this twenty gazillion times, but it seriously is true. It's the thought that counts! 🍪

Ciao for now, Arizona